

Movie Makers

March-April, 2001

Volume 11 No. 2

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

Faulty Philosophies

No 14 – September 1993

George Cushman

Unqualified persons asked to judge a motion picture competition often possess faulty philosophies. Here are some that have been heard at judging session:

1. I can never vote for a picture I don't like. This is a prime example of a subjective judge. The picture may have been extremely well made, but just because the judge doesn't like it for some personal reason, the maker suffers.

2. I won't vote for a picture unless it entertains me. Who said every picture in a competition has to be entertaining? What is entertaining anyway?

What entertains one judge may bore another. A superb teaching film may be nearly perfect and accomplish its intent. It was not made to entertain. Any work has to be judged on how well it achieves its purpose cinematically.

3. I can't vote for a picture unless it moves me emotionally. Ah! But there are many emotions. Any one in particular? What moves one person emotionally may not move another in the same way, or maybe not at all. If a picture is made with the intent of moving an audience emotionally, then this judge may have a point, but any picture that is well made and achieves its purpose may or may not move any or all of an audience emotionally.

4. A picture has to be above average to receive award

consideration. What is average? Ask a dozen different photographers and you'll get a dozen different answers. In a competition, as in a foot race, competition is among only all the entries in that specific contest. No way can they be evaluated among entries at a prior time. An aver-

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

As I mentioned last month, I need to find out your membership expiration date *if there is not any date listed on the address label*. Please help me! Many of you have responded but unfortunately, many of you haven't, so if you are one of those, please drop a note or send an

e - m a i l t o
<rgaretson@aol.com>

Roger Garretson, Sec/Tres

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Movie Makers

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George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From the Editor

I just finished watching the winner's reel from the last AMPS festival. Overall I was pleased with what I saw. All the entries were technically well done with attention paid to lighting, framing and quality audio. Applause to the winners.

The area I want to focus on is content.

Does content play a role in festivaling? Absolutely. In watching some of the travel videos, while well produced, were not of much interest to me as I am used to fast paced, high energy types of production. Does that mean I wouldn't of voted for them as winners? I don't know. I didn't get to see the productions that didn't place so I have nothing to compare the winners with.

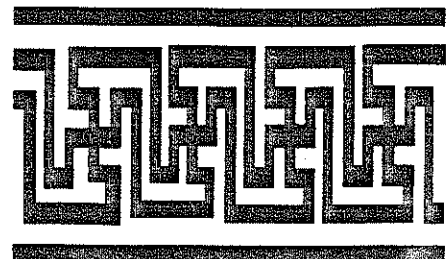
As a college professor, I must constantly "judge" my students' work. What do I take into consideration? First, does the piece meet the requirements set forth in the project? I also look at technical quality. Did the student use a microphone? Is the lighting appropriate? Did the student use a tripod or shoot shaky handheld? A "Budding" production student makes lots of technical mistakes that are easy to catch.

What about content? At the beginning of the semester I review with the students what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable content. Except for certain topics, the content can be left up to the student. I try to grade on how well the production values support the content or the telling of the story. But do judges in festivals act in this fashion? Since there aren't any set rules for what constitutes a judge, probably no training prior to the judging, and unless the program is just awful technically, the judge is going to award based on content.

So it all goes back to my mantra, find out as much as possible about the festival and the judges before you submit an entry. Politics as well as content and productions values will play a role in who wins. After all, the "Blair Witch Project" was considered a financial success. But in my opinion, in a technical comparison with the AMPS winners, the "Blair Witch" loses.

As always you may e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu.

Matt Jenkins



Character Counts: Part 3

David Byland,
Oklahoma Baptist University

By way of recapping, the three main ingredients in creating believable characters are:

- Observation
- Fictionalization
- The Golden Key

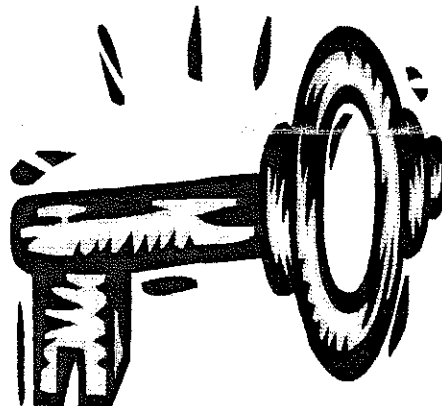
We've already discussed the first two concepts. Writers need to be keen observers of people, otherwise their characters will turn out flat. Observing isn't enough, though. A good imagination allows the writer to put the people being observed into vignette, a fictional interaction with others. This helps to stretch the imagination and build a "bank" of characters to dip into in the future.

But this creation of an artificial world and the characters in it is only an exercise to help develop the writer's imagination and ability to tell a story. What happens when you have a great story, that centers around some characters that must behave in a certain way in order for the story to be told? How do you make the characters do what they're told? How do you manipulate them and direct them to tell your story in your way? The answer is simple...find out what they want.

I'm going to go out on a bit of a limb here and say that every character in every script should WANT something. I mean EVERY character. Motivation is what brings characters to life. It is what drives the char-

acters and the action in your script. Think about it... How interesting is a character who has no wants, no desires? What purpose does that character serve in moving the action forward in your script?

In my opinion, the most important element in creating believable characters is what I call "The Golden Key". Having spent several years studying acting and scriptwriting, I've come to the conclusion that the writer who does not possess the Golden Key to each character is doomed to create static, hardly believable characters that an audience can not connect with. Why? Because the Golden Key unlocks the secret of the over-



riding want of the character.

In order to discover the Golden Key, I use a check sheet of over fifty items I've adapted from my days as an actor. I explore elements such as the appearance of the character to his daydreams, his hopes and his ethics. By carefully examining each of these traits, I begin to understand not only how my character will behave in any given situation, but why he will behave that way.

Space won't permit me to list all the character aspects I use to discover the Golden Key to my characters, but I will point out a

few of them I believe will help you on your way:

- His/her appearance
- His/her loves
- His/her fears
- His/her hopes
- His/her anger
- His/her uncertainty
- His/her pain

As I said, these are just a few of the areas the writer needs to explore when developing characters. Ultimately, however, they all must point toward one overarching desire or need. One of my students recently commented that people are driven by many desires and creating characters with one main driving force seemed contrived. In one sense that's true, but we need to be careful of cluttering up our characters with a myriad of conflicting motivations. In addition, by using the Character Aspects check list, we can see how every part of our characters life relates back to the one main desire. If the character desires power, she may use her rage, her love, her sexuality to achieve it. The same student commented that this sounded more like philosophy or psychology than screenwriting...and he's right! It's called doing your homework. Once you know your characters, you will be able to place them into conflict and know how they will react. You will be able to establish goals for them and methods of achieving those goals that are consistent with their inner desires. You will know their wants and have the power to grant or deny them. In possessing the Golden Key, you possess the secret to creating believable characters that will bring vitality to your script.

Thoughts on Judging...

Roger Garretson

Speaking of judging, I had three occasions to discuss it during the past month. One, I was a judge for another club's video contest. (They are located in Victoria B.C. so I should be safe from harm.) The second and third incidents involved a nation wide contest.

Some one had written comments regarding the decisions of the judges in this contest that offended the judges.

I can understand that, but I also can understand the comments by others about their decisions.

Judging is a matter of interpreting all the facets that go in to preparing and editing of a video production. There are so many things to consider, exposure, composition, video content, sound and many, *many* more things.

Then we come to the editing of this epoch production and it all adds up. One thing that the producer often doesn't consider is, the interest that his audience has in the subject. If this is a documentary about all the aspects of garbage collection, you

probably won't find many interested viewers (except of course, other garbage collectors!)

To be perfectly fair to the producer though, judges should explore all the technical aspects of the video, and if all aspects are done well, the video should be judged favorably. However, this often doesn't occur, so, there are unhappy people. Who is right? I don't know, but the reason that we have many different contests nation wide, is to give additional opportunity to video producers to have their work accepted and favorably judged.

Lastly, judging a major contest is a thankless task. Winners think the judges are wonderful, losers think they are a bunch of jerks. You can't win!

Keep that in mind when you look at other peoples entries and put yourself in the judges shoes, did the production have a good story, did it have movement or was it just a slide show, was the narration suitable to the content of the video, was the music appropriate, did the whole thing move along, was it too long, did it keep your interest?

Lots of questions, you bet, but that is what this fascinating hobby is all about. Very few of us do it well. But, we can keep trying.

If you don't succeed

though, don't blame the judges, they are just like you, trying to do a good job!

Filmmaker's Work Preserved

With more than twelve films and six video programs to his credit, amateur filmmaker Sid Laverentis is receiving national recognition for his efforts. Every year the Library of Congress chooses twenty-five films to add to its collection. A Laverentis film has been chosen as one of the twenty-five.

According to David Francis, Chief of the Library of Congress Motion Picture, television, and Recorded Sound Division, there was a small conference on amateur filmmaking and the Laverentis film "Multiple Sidosis" was voted the favorite.

Inspired by Les Paul and Mary Ford's music recordings where they played all the instruments, Sid produced a film where multiple Sid's can be seen playing different instruments. He used a two-track audiotape machine and a Bolex 16mm camera. Laverentis edited over 1900 feet of film down to just 325 feet for the final ten-minute product.

"Multiple Sidosis" is included in the National Film Registry along side many of America's most popular works.

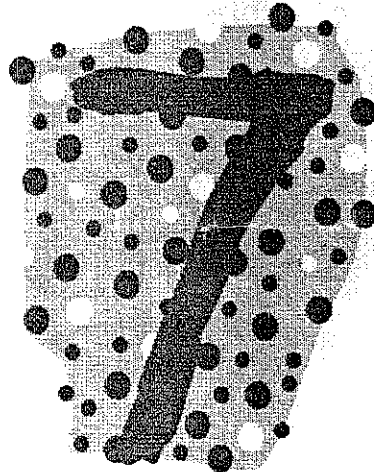
Video making success

Ernest D Smith

In the January 2001 issue of *Videomaker*, Matthew York the publisher of that magazine, outlines seven keys to the success of making video. He first suggests that the size of an audience does not make a video successful. A video to an audience of one might be successful if it pertains to a parent explaining to a child why the parents split up. A video to an audience of thousands might not be successful if it's like the junk on MTV.

The newest and latest equipment and good production techniques are important and can lend help in making a successful video, but that is not enough. I have told myself many times that while an editing hard drive makes for faster edits, it does not cut down on the time that it takes to make the editing decisions, the planning of the shoot, or the story line that the video is suppose to tell. Those intangible, subjective things we call talent are the things that make a successful video. All of the newest and latest equipment in the world will never be a substitute for the sweat and tears that we put into our productions. Talent is allusive and slippery. Some people have

voices of angels. Some have the deft touch of da Vinci. Some are Cecil B DeMilles. But was it always so? When they were born did they have that perfection? When you were born, did you know how to crawl, walk or talk? Didn't it take time to perfect those talents? Didn't it take time for you to woo the lady or man of your heart? All of those talents took time to perfect. What then makes wannabe movie moguls think movies can be made without some effort? Without practic-



ing the trade?

What were the seven keys to success in making great videos that Matt York suggested? Practice, practice, practice, practice, practice, practice, and practice. We never learn to drive a car, fly a plane or make great video with out practice. The innate talent that we might have been born with will never become great if the camcorder just gathers dust on the shelf.

Microphone Hint

Roger Garretson

For those of you who use a microphone to monitor your audio while videotaping (and all of you should!): many mikes have a coiled cord that can stretch out of control after awhile. Here is your handy hint.

Put a piece of string through the coiled loop part of the cord. Tie it to one end of the cord close to the coil, then compress the coil as much as possible, then tie the other end of the string to the other end. Result? No long stretchy cord. If you need the longer cord, just untie the string. This hint brought to you by Fred Ginsburg, the owner of Equipment Emporium in Mission Hills. If you want to learn a lot about sound equipment, log on to Fred's web site, <www.equipmentemporium.com> He has a wealth of information there for you. download.

Another mike tip: save the little clips that come on those name tags you get at a convention, the kind that have a little loop that holds the tag in place. Throw away the tag, then attach the clip to your shirt or jacket, place the mike cord in the loop that used to hold the tag and voila, it keeps the cord under control.

To Tell The Truth, Part 2

Stan Whitsitt

(Editor's note. This is part two of a presentation originally given at the 1994 SCCA-TBW-SAVAC &S Convention. It also appeared in the September-October 1994 Panorama. Thanks to Stan Whitsitt for its publication here.)

Reviewed as particularly memorable is a walrus hunt in which Nanook sneaks up on a group of walrus on shore and wounds one with his harpoon. With the aid of the other Eskimos he struggles to prevent the huge animal from getting away. Its mate tries to pry the fatally wounded walrus from the harpoon.

In another portion, an igloo is built for temporary shelter. Flaherty removed part of it to shoot interior scenes. Purists would say he was cheating on the concept of pure documentary, but his motive was to show how his subjects lived, and the liberty taken was in the interest of truthful portrayal.

He worked a few lighter moments into the film. He had taken a phonograph and records and he shows Nanook intrigued by these alien

items. He suspiciously examines the phonograph, and then tries to bite off a piece of the record.

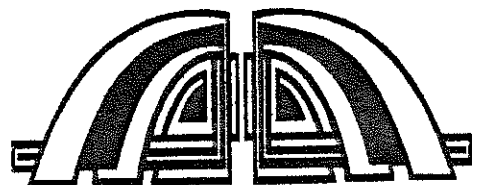
After success of "NANOOK" Flaherty was sent to Samoa. From that trip he produced the film "Moana," an anthropological study of life in three South Seas. To those of you who think "sexploitation" in the movies was phenomenon surfacing in the decadent '80's, here's enlightenment for you. In 1926 when the film opened at the Rialto in New York, its advertising promoted the work as "The Love Life of a South Seas Siren." In considering its commercial possibilities, producer Hunt Stromberg is said to have urged, "Let's fill the screen with t***."

That takes care of history! Now let's roll up our pant legs and wade into the reality of actually creating our own film. Before you start shooting your documentary, as with any film, it is essential that you have a clear idea of what you want to show and how you want to present it. On the other hand it is equally essential not to be too rigid in your ideas as to how an item will be handled. There is a high degree of uncertainty inherent in the nature of the genre, so one should strive to maintain a certain amount of flexibility.

It goes without saying; detailed research is vital. This phase cannot be emphasized

too strongly. Strive for the highest degree of accuracy if you want to maintain the integrity of your work. There is a whole army of critics waiting to shoot you down if you err.

If the work is to be shown on television, there are a few technical points to consider. Try to avoid extremes in exposure. The cameraman should aim for low contrast scenes. Keep the sky out of the shots as much as possible, otherwise the foreground detail and anything against the skyline tend to come out at silhouettes. Video equipment automatically reacts to the dominant tone in the picture area and adjusts itself to it. Light and dark areas come out over done. Wide shots that look fantastic on the screen are lost when reduced to the proportion of television. Long shots are just not very effective on TV. What really comes into its own in video is the close-up. Video could be described as the "intimate medium." Establishing shots, though essential to the scene or story should be kept to a minimum. Because of this "scale," busy shots that would be acceptable on the wide screen, will look cluttered and confusing when reduced to television dimensions.



(Continued from page 1)

age will vary from contest to contest, from year to year. And, after all, is not an average in any art form but a personal opinion?

5. Travelogs should be to new places, not the same old lands we've seen umpteen times before. It is doubtful that there is any spot on this earth today that has not at some time in the past been the subject of a camera's eye. Because a judge is seeing a film or video of some place he/she has seen many times before is no reason to ignore it and not give its maker the kudos the piece may deserve. A judge's likes, dislike, and previous experiences must have not

bearing on the location of any travelog.

6. I don't like story pictures they are all the same. There are probably no new story lines, only changes to old ones. If ten copies of a story script were given to ten experienced movie makers, the result would be ten stories all alike, but told in ten different ways. Any judge worth his/her salt would have his/her hands full trying to select the best.

7. Only new and novel subject matter deserves top consideration. Even when poorly made? A worker makes a masterpiece on an old sub-

ject. Why must he/she be penalized because a judge has seen that subject many times before? No two subjects are ever treated the same. There can be a different point of view, an entirely new style, or any of a jillion other concepts of presentation.

Any of the seven thoughts on judging presented here would be grossly unfair to a contestant. Any picture well done cinematically is all any judge has the right to ask. Such thinking hurts a competition. Don't let this kind of thinking infiltrate a jury.

Upcoming Festivals

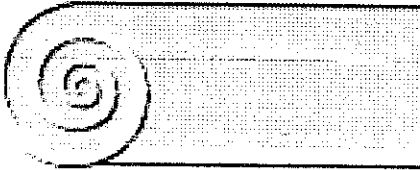
Close Date	Festival Name and address for forms	Open to:	Subject	Format	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
4/9/01 See note 1	9 th Croatian Minute Movie Cup GFR Film-Video, 34 000 Pozega, p.p. 709,CROATIA	ABC DE	open	PAL MN DV betacam	one minute	unknown	uvw	5/25- 26
5/31/01 See Note 1	Duisburg Int'l Non-Professional Film Festival and International Youth Video Forum Hansjoachim Stampehl, Alemannenstraße 60, D-97318 Kitzingen	ABC under 27 yrs old	Open	all video S8, 16mm, 35mm	30 minutes	no charge	medals	11/28- 12/2
7/701	Cotswold Int'l & Video Festival, %Lee Prescott, 37 Canberra, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, England GL10 2 PR e-mail: leepres@anglovideogxy.demon.co.uk				20 min AB 30 min G	\$13A \$8 B \$19G	TUVW	9/14- 15
8/31/01	72 ND American Int'l Film & Video Festival % AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377 e-mail: rgaretson@aol.com	ABC D	Open	HJLMN OPQ	30 min	\$10 \$8 add'l entries	UV	10/11- 14
8/15/01	SAVAC Int'l Movie Contest, % Bob Makara 264 Hamilton Ct., Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236 or e-mail: remakara@yahoo.com	ABC	Open	HJMNO P	20 min	\$10 xx \$20 yy	UV	10/10- 14
N/A Not Announced or not available								
ALL FORMATS ARE NTSC UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED								
A Amateur B College Student C Hi Sch or Grade School	D Independant E Com'l F Restricted	G Open	H S 8 J 16mm K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mmvid P Hi 8 Q MiniDV	R Regional S exceptions T Cash U Trophies	V Certificates W Other Award X Approximate Y It varies	xx Members yy Non Member zz	

Note 1 Within the USA, entry forms can be obtained from Roger Garretson (see pg 2 for address or e-mail)

AMPS DUES INCREASE

Unfortunately, costs still rise and it's hard to stay ahead. So AMPS dues will be increased on January 1st, 2001. The increase will be from \$7 to \$10 for U.S. memberships.

At \$10, AMPS membership is still a great bargain. You receive six issues of the "Movie Makers" newsletter, you have an opportunity to contribute to the newsletter. And your memberships helps supports the oldest continuously run film/video festival in the world.



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 10.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 12.00

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Enclosed _____

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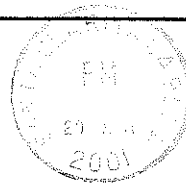
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